CONTENT AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PRIMARY SOURCES

Introduction

“Context” means the social meaning or shared interpretation of a situation which is the underlying perspective reflected in the text.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION in the text may be analyzed within **social, political, economic or religious framework**.

In doing **CONTEXT ANALYSIS**, students interpret and make sound judgement on the historical situation of the source. They journey to the time and place of the sources and consequently feel the situation at that time. More importantly, they determine the author's background, intent and authority on the subject and ascertain the sources relevance and meaning today's landscape.

In contrast, **CONTENT ANALYSIS** allows students to apply appropriate techniques depending on the type of source (written, oral, visual). In a written source, for example, students read the text or historical transcript and analyze the meaning of such words and concepts. Thereafter, they develop inferences and draw conclusions about the messages or the texts where they present the writer's point of view as well as the audience to which the material is written. It is also in doing content analysis that students are able to identify the author’s argument or thesis, compare points of view, identify biases, and evaluate his claim based on evidences or available evidences at the time.

Topic: A Guide for Using Primary Source or Original Source Documents

Introduction

Imparting history through primary sources links students to the past in many significant and powerful ways. It can offer eye opening perspectives among students to see the advantages of primary documents over textbook accounts. This is essential especially that some or Students believe that history is impersonal and therefore irrelevant to their lives. Inasmuch as this course analyses Philippine history from the lens of primary sources, students must be given opportunity to perform content and contextual analysis of the different kinds of primary sources. This experience allows them to learn how to "do" history like historians. They interpret evidences and to piece together a narrative of historical explanation and to construct richer meaning of the everyday world around them. Moreover, they participate in asking questions where they develop critical thinking, intelligent inferences, and reasoned arguments and insights of events and issues in the past and present.

For students to have a glimpse of using and analyzing primary sources, the reading titled “A Guide for Using Source or Original Source Documents'" by Minnesota Humanities Center (n.d.) is presented in this section. The article presents one of the many techniques or methods in analyzing historical sources called Origin, Purpose, Value, and Limitation (OPVL). This method is sometimes known as Document Based Questions (DBQ) which is very important in analyzing historical documents.

A Guide for Using Primary Source or Original Source Documents
Minnesota Humanities Center

Origin, Purpose, Value and Limitation (OPVL) is a technique for analyzing historical documents. It is used extensively in the International Baccalaureate curriculum and testing materials, and is incredibly helpful in teaching students to be critical observers. It is also known as Document Based Questions (DBQ).

OPVL can be adapted to be used in any grade. Younger students can answer more concrete, factual questions about a document, while older students have more capacity for abstract reasoning, placing documents in historical context, and drawing conclusions.

Origin:

In order to analyze a source, you must first know what it is. Sometimes not all of these questions can be answered. The more you do know about where a document is coming from, the easier it is to ascertain purpose, value and limitation. The definition of primary and secondary source materials can be problematic. There is constant debate among academic circles on how to definitively categorize certain documents and there is no clear rule of what makes a document a primary or a secondary source.

Primary – letter, journal, interview, speeches, photos, paintings, etc. Primary sources are created by someone who is the "*first person";* these documents can also be called "original source documents. The author or creator is presenting original materials as a result of discovery or to share new information or opinions. Primary documents have not been filtered through interpretation or evaluation by others. In order to get a complete picture of an event or era, it is necessary to consult multiple--and often contradictory--sources.

Secondary – materials that are written with the benefit of hindsight and materials that filter primary sources through interpretation or evaluation. Books commenting on a historical incident in history are secondary sources. Political cartoons can be tricky because they can be considered either primary or secondary.

Note: One is not more reliable than the other. Valuable information can be gleaned from both types of documents. A primary document can tell you about the original author's perspective; a secondary document can tell you how the primary document was received during a specific time period or by a specific audience.

Other questions must be answered beyond whether the source is primary or secondary and will give you much more information about the document that will help you answer questions in the other categories.

- Who created it?
- Who is the author?
- When was it created?
- When was it published?
- Where was it published?
- Who is publishing it?
- Is there anything we know about the author that is pertinent to our evaluation?

This last question is especially important. The more you know about the author of a document, the easier it is to answer the following questions.

Purpose:

This is the point where you start the real evaluation of the piece and try to figure out the purpose for its creation. You must be able to think as the author of the document. At this point you are still only focusing on the single piece of work you are evaluating.

- Why does this document exist?
- Why did the author create this piece of work? What is the intent?
- Why did the author choose this particular format? •Who is the intended audience? Who was the author thinking would receive this?
- What does the document "say"?
- Can it tell you more than is on the surface?

If you are teaching at the high school level, try to steer students away from saying "I think the document means this..." Obviously, if students are making a statement it is coming from their thinking. Help them practice saying "The document means this...because it is supported by x evidence."

Value:

Now comes the hard part. Putting on your historian hat, you must determine: Based on who wrote it, *when/where* it came from and why it was created...what value does this document have as a piece of evidence? This is where you show your expertise and put the piece in context. Bring in your outside information here.

- What can we tell about the author from the piece?
- What can we tell about the time period from the piece?
- Under what circumstances was the piece created and how does the piece reflect those circumstances?
- What can we tell about any controversies from the piece?
- Does the author represent a particular 'side' of a controversy or event?
- What can we tell about the author's perspectives from the piece?
- What was going on in history at the time the piece was created and how does this piece accurately reflect it?

It helps if you know the context of the document and can explain what the document helps you to understand about the context.

Limitation:

This is probably the hardest part. The task here is not to point out weaknesses of the source, but rather to say: *at what point does this source cease to be of value to us as historians?*

With a primary source document, having an incomplete picture of the whole is a given because the source was created by one person (or a small group of people?), naturally they will not have given every detail of the context. Do not say that the author left out information unless you have concrete proof (from another source) that they chose to leave information out.

Also, it is obvious that the author did not have prior knowledge of events that came after the creation of the document. Do not state that the document "does not explain X" (if X happened later).

Being biased does not limit the value of a source! If you are going to comment on the bias of a document, you must go into detail. Who is it biased towards? Who is it biased against? What part of a story does it leave out? What part of the story is MISSING because of parts left out?

- What part of the story can we NOT tell from this document?
- How could we verify the content of the piece?

- Does this piece inaccurately reflect anything about the time period?
- What does the author leave out and why does he/she leave it out (if you know)?
- What is purposely not addressed?

This is again an area for you to show your expertise of the context. You need to briefly explain the parts of the story that the document leaves out. Give examples of other documents that might mirror or answer this document. What parts of the story/context can this document not tell?

Feedback

Read and analyze each statement below. Write A if the first statement is correct and B if it is incorrect on the space provided before each 1tem.

___1. OPVL is sometimes known as Document Based Questions (DBQ).
___2. Origin in historical source analysis refers to where the source comes from such as who is the author/artist, the date it was written/finished, and which country the author/artist was born in.
___3. Purpose in historical source analysis refers to the ideas/feelings which is what the author/artist is trying to express/evoke.
___4. Value in historical source analysis is linked with the amount of bias in the source which implies that the more bias the author, the less valuable is the source
___5. Limitations in historical source analysis is also linked with bias, that is, if the source has been translated from the original then the language difference will be another source of inaccuracy and a limitation.
___6. Commentaries on a historical incident in history are considered primary sources.
___7. It 1s easier to analyze historical source when one knows more about the author of the document.
___8. Telling the author's perspectives from the piece is an investigation of purpose under OPVL.
___9. Determining which part of the story is not conveyed or narrated in the document is an investigation of value under OPVL.
___10. Analyzing the intended audience of the document is an investigation of purpose under OPVL.
___11. Examining who the author is biased towards and biased against is a question of purpose in OPVL.